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SUBJECT: STRIKES IN JORDAN'S QIZ FACTORIES

REF: EASON-BRIGGS-DEMARIA-BROWN-PISANI 10/1/07 E-MAIL

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¶1. (SBU) Summary: Workers, predominately Bangladeshi, have gone on strike at two factories in Jordan's Qualifying Industrial Zones (QIZs). The Ministry of Labor (MOL) has been monitoring situations at both factories and facilitating negotiations with management. Following receipt of information from the National Labor Committee (NLC) on the strike at Cotton Craft factory, MOL immediately called factory management and the local director of the Government of Jordan (GOJ) Labor Office in al-Tajamouat Industrial City (Ref A). Both were unaware of any cases of illness among the workers, and began making the necessary arrangements to transfer the individual named in the NLC report to the hospital for appropriate treatment. Some of the worker demands reflect ongoing issues, such as issuance of temporary worker permits and waiver of penalties, which the MOL continues to address (Refs B, C). In other cases, however, workers have not been cooperative in conveying legitimate claims and working with the GOJ, or their own country's embassy in Jordan, to resolve problems. End Summary.

Cotton Craft Strike

¶2. (U) As noted in Ref A, Bangladeshi and Sri Lankan workers at Cotton Craft Garment Factory in al-Tajamouat QIZ in Sahab have been on strike since mid-September. Since the strike began, MOL officials have visited the factory seven or eight times and facilitated negotiations between the management and workers, according to the head of the MOL Inspection Directorate, Dr. Amin Wreidat. Wreidat provided Post the following details on some of the demands and claims by workers:

-- (SBU) Regular Wages and Overtime: Cotton Craft's general management provided documents to MOL showing that the workers received their wages for July and August 2007. Documents also showed that workers received overtime payments for July. Wreidat clarified that management indicated that the Bengali managers "played with records," claiming excess hours of overtime that employees never actually worked, as verified by the fact that the factory generally closed between 6-7 p.m. during that month. According to Wreidat, management paid the July overtime it believed was legitimate, and workers were still negotiating payment of the additional hours they claim to have worked when the strike began. Wreidat said that MOL has had a difficult time verifying the true number of hours worked.

-- (SBU) Back Wages: Wreidat also noted that there were issues of back wages owed to workers from the previous owners of the factory. The new owners had agreed with workers in June to pay the back wages in 50 JD installments, and provided documents to MOL showing that they had subsequently followed through with three payments, leaving only a small outstanding balance (Ref C).

-- (SBU) Passports: Wreidat said management had been holding workers' passports with employees' written consent. In response to demands by the workers, factory management tried to return the passports, but the workers then reportedly refused to accept them. MOL planned to send a team to Cotton Craft on October 2 to resolve this issue.

-- (SBU) Temporary Worker Permits: Wreidat confirmed that the employees at Cotton Craft received temporary worker permits as part of the larger MOL process to address penalties and regularize workers' status (Refs B, C).

-- (SBU) Dormitories: Cotton Craft management rented a new dormitory for workers as of September 18; both the management and MOL Labor Office believe the new accommodations and furniture are better than current lodging. The workers, however, refuse to move. Yousaf Rahman, Labor and Consular Officer at the Embassy of Bangladesh in Jordan, said that factory employees no longer trust the management, and therefore are skeptical of any new arrangements.

-- (SBU) Water and Electricity: A dispute ensued between the factory management and the landlord over the current dormitory because the premises had not yet been vacated after termination of the contract, hindering the landlord from

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renting it to another tenant. To push the factory to vacate, the landlord cut off the water and electricity. The landlord and management have since reached a settlement, and the utilities have been reconnected. Cotton Craft management also indicated to MOL that workers will sometimes cut cables to disconnect the electricity supply themselves if they know inspectors are coming, as verified by the fact that the electricity is disconnected from the inside rather than the outside.

-- (SBU) Food: Wreidat said that management provided food to the workers in the dormitory, which the employees refused and threw out the windows in front of witnesses, causing safety issues for passersby and a significant amount of time and money to clean up. As a result, management informed the MOL in writing that food would be cut off. Upon receipt of the letter, MOL called Cotton Craft, which agreed to resume supplying food in the factory's cafeteria instead of in the dorm. A letter dated October 2 from Cotton Craft to MOL states that the workers are informed daily that the food is still provided in the factory's cafeteria and available to workers at any time. Rahman said he does not believe factory management has been consistently offering food to workers on strike.

-- (SBU) Medical Assistance: Wreidat confirmed that the management of Cotton Craft and Director of MOL's Labor Office in that area were making arrangements for the transfer of one ill employee, Mr. Azizul, identified in Ref A, to the hospital if needed.

-- (SBU) Transfer to other Factories: Although some of the workers have requested a transfer to other factories, Wreidat said that allowing such a transfer would encourage more strikes in the future whenever someone wants to switch factories. Sending workers back to their home countries also poses challenges, because MOL does not have funding to buy plane tickets for workers, and the new factory management is likely not keen to pay such expenses for workers who have only been under their employment for three months.

CCKM Strike

12. (U) Wreidat also noted that 400 Bangladeshi workers went on strike October 1 in CCKM Apparel Manufacturing Company in al-Tajamouat QIZ. The strike was organized by 15-20 employees, who refused to speak with or give a list of demands to MOL. Wreidat personally visited the factory and tried to speak with other workers to determine the problem, but the core organizers of the strike reportedly threatened them with beatings if they talked to the Jordanian government. The few people that Wreidat did speak with said that they had no problems with the factory, and were only striking due to pressure by fellow workers.

13. (SBU) Rahman told Econoff that the workers at CCKM have issues with residency permits and their allowance by law of 14 days annual leave. He said that one of the problems is that Bengali workers are not approaching the Bangladeshi Embassy for assistance before going on strike, which could help determine whether employees have legitimate claims or not. He noted that MOL has been cooperating with the Bangladeshi Embassy in Jordan on these matters.

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